

IN BUDDHIST TEMPLES V. KOYA-SAN

High up on the mountain of Kōya, 3000 ft. above the sea surrounded by forests of cryptomeria and fir, in a saucer-like plateau, rests the temple village of Kōya, the holy place of pilgrimage to devotees of the Shingon sect. For a thousand years the light has been burning in the Mandoro, and here come pilgrims from all over the world to do homage to Kōbō Daishi, the great founder of the Shingon sect. On the summit lies the village which extends with its borders of temple buildings for two miles surrounded by eight peaks which represent the eight petals of the lotus which in turn represent eight Buddhas. It is said that the form of Kōya-san is like a sleeping dragon from West to East and like a sitting tiger from North to South. An old poem states, "If a man take a step on this mountain, at that minute his troubles clear away by the wind that blows over Kōya's many peaks." Indeed Kōya-san is filled with peace and calm—a troubled soul may here find surcease of his woes.

Kōya-san was discovered by Kōbō Daishi. Wishing to find a quiet remote place to establish a home for his mystic teaching, he wandered over many mountains in the vicinity of Kyoto and felt that he found in Kōya-san the ideal spot. There is a story of his meeting the resident god of the mountain, accompanied by his two dogs, who directed Kōbō Daishi to the summit of the mountain. Kōbō Daishi had a friend in the Emperor Saga and he asked him to give the mountain to him. The Emperor heeded his request and the grant in the handwriting of the Emperor is still preserved at Kōya as one of its treasures.

In the ninth year of Kōnin (818 A.D.), Kōbō Daishi began with the help of his disciples to excavate the mountain and the first temple was built the next year and soon after great temple buildings rose up. When it was entirely

finished it must indeed have been a grand place with stately buildings, elegant pagoda, golden Buddhas, with wonderful pictures and statues and filled with priests entoning the holy sutras. It was here that Kōbō Daishi died or rather entered into meditation, for his followers believe that he is still living in the tomb, lost in contemplation, awaiting the coming of Maitreya, the future Buddha. He predicted his own death, and when the time came, summoned his disciples, declared his will, and then sat down quietly, and entered a deep meditation from which he never emerged.

His grave is the Mecca of throngs of devoted followers who come to pray before his grave, offering incense and candles. His tomb stands among the giant trees of his beloved Kōya at the very end of the great cemetery. At Kōya it is believed that the spiritual light of Kōbō Daishi is still shedding its rays not only upon Kōya but upon all the temples and followers of Shingon throughout Japan. To Shingon believers Kōbō Daishi was not an ordinary man but an incarnation of the Buddha. Popularly, he is revered as a Bodhisattva and Kōya-san is dedicated to his spirit.

In its best days the temples are said to have numbered 2000 to 9000, but there are only about 110 left. Most of the temples at Kōya receive pilgrim-guests. There is no fixed fee for hospitality: every one gives what he can whether it is a large contribution from a wealthy follower or the modest offering of a poor pilgrim. The fare is strictly vegetarian.

The chief sight at Kōya-san is the cemetery. It extends a broad avenue one and a half miles long through a forest of cryptomeria and hinoki trees on each side of which are monuments of all kinds, large and small, elaborate and simple in the forms of slabs, shafts, pagodas with statues of Bodhisattvas. Huge *gorinto*, the stone monuments in five parts representing the five elements—earth, water, fire, air, space, symbolised by square, circle, pyramid, crescent, and sphere—are many and whether large or small they are always impressive. Here are tombstones or memorial stones for many

famous men of the past, warriors and noble men as well as of Shingon devotees and priests who have died recently. At the end of the stately avenue is the tomb of Kōbō Daishi where lights and incense are always burning and devotion is ever offered. Shingon followers like to be buried at Kōya if possible, and if not to have a portion of their ashes interred in a common receptacle near the tomb of Kōbō Daishi.

On one side we see the graves of the celebrated heroes Atsumori and Kumagai Naozane, we see the great tombstones of prominent daimyo, memorial stones erected to the memory of celebrated priests like Hōnen Shōnin and Shinran Shōnin, to men of literature like the poet Bashō, to actors like Ichikawa Danjūro, and near Kōbō Daishi's tomb is a separate enclosure which holds the monuments of Emperors. In the Hall of Light many oil lamps are burning in memory of the dead. For a small fee the visitor may have a lamp burning for a day or a day and a night or he may arrange to have a light burning for a longer period. The burning of a light is a pious offering in the eyes of Buddhists, and there are some who believe that in whatever one of the six worlds the departed one may be, he will be aware in some way of blessing, of the flame lighted for him.

There is a story told that recalls the story in the Bible, of the widow's mite. It is said that a very rich man offered ten thousand lamps while a poor woman who possessed nothing cut off her hair in order to sell it to get money for one lamp. Her offering was acceptable and is said to be still burning in the Mandōrō Hall. The lamp lighted by the Emperor Shirakawa in 1023 has never been extinguished.

The Great Kondō or Golden Hall of Kōya was burned in December 1926 and priceless treasures went in flames, but it is now being rebuilt and it is said will be very beautiful. The re-building of the Kondō shows that Buddhist piety is still a living thing in Japan, for the money to do it comes from the followers both rich and poor. In the vicinity of

the Kondō are a number of small buildings containing statues of the Buddha or Bodhisattvas, a pagoda and the Mieido which enshrines a celebrated picture of Kōbō Daishi. It is considered a very holy object and is never shown to the general public. Near here is the shrine erected to the Myōjin or mountain god who directed Kōbō Daishi to Kōya. It has a beautiful setting of high trees and seems to give out from its precincts a special atmosphere of quiet and calm. It is interesting to note that the two dogs who accompanied the Myōjin are also enshrined here. The Emperor offered the black dog for the province of Kii and the white dog for the province of Awaji.

Kōya has a great gate called the Daimon; it is 138 ft. high. Besides it is a very large bronze statue of Kwannon, the Bodhisattva of compassion. In the ninth year of Meiwa (1772), a great fire took place in Tokyo, many people perished, and this statue was erected for the peace of their spirits.

The Kongōbuji constructed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in memory of his mother, the official residence of the Abbot, is the chief temple at Kōya. It is extensive and impressive with a splendid curved roof and fine wood-carving in the gates and porches. The rooms are large and elegant with wall screens painted by celebrated artists. These rooms are named in accord with their decorations, the Willow Room, the Plum Room, the Pine-tree Room, and so on. The Willow Room is the site of the apartment where Hidetsugu, the adopted son of Hideyoshi, committed *harakiri* at the command of his august father. In the Hall of Ancestral Tablets, there are those to the memory of the Imperial Family; and it is interesting to note that here reposes the memorial tablet for the Honorable Mrs. Gordon, an earnest student of Buddhism, whose grave is in the Koya cemetery. Kōbō Daishi is enshrined here. The whole building is an example of the spaciousness and beauty of an ideal Buddhist temple.

The Daishi Hall is a large and fine building erected in

recent years and used as a church for all the activities of the Kōbō Daishi Association of Kōya, which is organised for the purpose of propagating and extending the teaching of the saint of Shingon. Here are held lectures, Sunday school, summer school, and meetings of all kinds in connection with the religious work of the sect.

There are many other temples in Kōya and each one of them contains treasures in the form of statues or pictures, pagodas or gardens. The oldest and one of the finest is the Kongo Sammai In. It contains a very wonderful screen, a national treasure, by Oguri Sōtan (1398-1464). But most interesting of all is the Tahōto, a two-storied pagoda built by the wife of Yoritomo in 1190. It is the oldest building in Kōya and contains some wonderful statues by the master Unkei—the centre figure is Dainichi (Mahāvairochana) with Amida, Shaka, Ashuku, and Hōshō. The expressions on the faces of these figures reflect the beauty and compassion of Mahayana Bodhisattvas and truly symbolise the characteristic qualities of these Bodhisattvas of wisdom and compassion.

At the Shōjō-shin In, the most elegant of the Kōya temples, there are many beautiful objects, screens, and pictures in Kakemono style, statues and ornaments, while the rooms themselves are works of art and the garden a glimpse of beauty. There are some wonderful screens from the brushes of Kano artists and also some fine monochrome ink panels of Sesshū. The Hall of the Memorial Tablets is spacious and impressive, all the ritualistic implements being of fine workmanship. Here are found the tablets of emperors and shoguns, daimyos, priests, and laymen of all kinds. Before them are intoned the sacred scriptures supposed to help to bring peace to the departed spirit. An atmosphere of quiet calm hangs over the precincts.

There are many stories and legends connected with Kōya-san but owing to lack of space I must refrain to tell them. There are stories connected with Kōbō Daishi and other eminent priests, stories about Hideyoshi and other

notable historical personages, legends regarding rocks and trees and birds, even romances connected with fair women in spite of the fact that from its establishment until 1868 women were denied entrance to Kōya-san.

I must not forget however to mention the gardens of Kōya, the charming one at Shōjō-shin In, where the pink lotus bloom, the artistic one at Tentoku In laid out by Kobori Enshū and a fine example of the master's art, the picturesque one at Fumon In serene in formality. Each temple has its garden and each one preserves its characteristic impression.

The walks on Kōya-san are beautiful, amid the giant trees and with temples and shrines on all sides—a priest passes in black robes rosary in hand—perhaps a procession is met, priests robed in lovely gowns of purple, red, and gold—a group of young students passes—some pilgrims pause before a temple gate.

There are schools and colleges at Kōya-san—college and university as well as elementary and middle schools. Some of the most eminent scholars of the sect reside here; there is a fine library and a splendid museum.

In the museum are preserved the most precious possessions of Kōya. It is impossible to describe them, magnificent examples of the artist, sculptor, and calligrapher. There are some from the brush and chisel of Kōbō Daishi. Nearly every one is a National Treasure.

There is only one that I can describe here and that is the jewel in the whole collection. It is the famous picture by Eshin Sōzu of Amida and the Twenty-five Bosatsu. It was painted in 965 A.D. at the temple of Enryakuji on Hiei-zan. It represents Amitabha accompanied by Twenty-Five Bodhisattvas welcoming the believer after death to the Pure Land. The central figure, the Amida, is of great beauty—he is the Buddha of Boundless Light, and light seems to be the characteristic of this painting. The colour of the picture is a predominating gold which increases the atmosphere of luminosity. The figures of the Bodhisattvas are grace com-

bined with strength, the expressions are love fused with power, and the golden Amida himself with his half-shut eyes and half-smiling mouth is symbolic of tender compassion. To this picture one can return again and again finding new beauty at each visit.

Tradition says that it was at the temple of Ryūkō In that Kōbō Daishi died and a small dark room in which an oil taper is burning is shown to special devotees of Shingon. This oil taper has been kept burning since his death. This temple is in possession of mementoes of his,—his rosary given by a Chinese Emperor, the Fudō sword and paintings and writings which he made.

Near here is the temple of Myōwo In which harbours the celebrated Red Fudo painted also by Eshin Sōzu said to be done with his own blood. It is a serious and mysterious picture which reveals its inner meaning only to a devotee of Shingon.

The reader can see that there is a wealth of interest and beauty, here at Kōya-san. Nature, art, and religion have been lavish in their gifts. He who comes to this lovely place may feel as if he has come to an earthly paradise where he can spend peaceful hours among the lofty trees, amid the sound of birds and the flutter of dragon-flies, listening to the jump of the red carp in the pond, and the sound of the ponderous but musical bell. Kōya-san has within it the element of peace which it has been drawing to itself since Kōbō Daishi, treading over the mountain, stopped here and said, "Here will I build my temple. Here will I make my religious home."

AT KOYA

(1)

In the deep pool—the golden carp,
In the pine-trees—the summer breeze,
On the rock edge—kingfisher blue,
In my heart's depth—profound calm,
Here in the garden of Sainan-In.

(2)

How far away they seem
 All the petty cares, the trifles of Life.
 Here in the temple!
 I feel myself expanding,
 As I become the All, the parts drop away.
 Indeed no parts are left,
 There is only One.

(3)

Birds, birds, birds!
 Wagtail, kingfisher, mountain dove.
 Why do you come to this temple garden?
 When I look at your pure beauty,
 I feel sure that you have come
 To worship the Buddha.

(4)

A strange quiet
 As if a Buddha stood at the edge of the wood
 With his finger on his lips.
 The birds, the carp, the leaves, even I
 Aware of his presence
 Suspend all movement.

(5)

I walked among the graves at Koya San
 City of the dead and giant trees,
 Engraved stones a mile before me,
 Chiseled stones a mile behind me,
 Statues of Buddhas all around me,
 I picture the dead living again,
 Princes, daimyos, priests, devotees,
 They walk among the trees at Koya San,
 They seem living and I seem dead.
 Thus beholding their pageantry
 I walked among the graves at Koya San,
 City of the living and great trees.

(6)

Among the lofty trees of Koya
 The moon looks down upon the graves;
 At the inner shrine stop and gaze
 Where Kobo Daishi sleeps in peace
 He is not dead they say,
 He is sleeping (how near Death is to Sleep!)

He is waiting for Maitreya. Is he lonely?
How can he be lonely?
The devotees come and go,
Reverence given, adoration,
Kobo Daishi sleeps in peace
Among the giant trees of Koya
Waiting he knows not of sorrow and loneliness,
Watching for Maitreya,
Watching for Maitreya.

SEIREN